

SAGINAW CHIPPEWA TRIBAL COLLEGE *TCU Ongoing Challenges During COVID-19 Pandemic*

117th Congress – February 2021



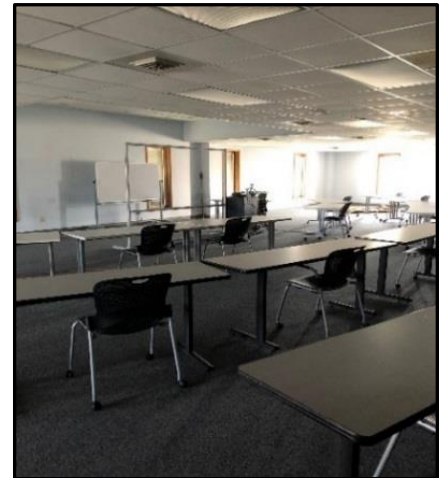
Through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA), Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College (Mount Pleasant, MI) received urgently needed funding to move classes online to the extent possible and begin to address tremendous digital divide challenges. We were also able to provide emergency grants, equipment, and tuition assistance to our students to help them stay enrolled in classes. As we continue to support students during this difficult time and plan for uninterrupted course delivery, our needs are growing. TCUs need your ongoing support to address current pandemic-related challenges and plan for an uncertain future.

CARES and CRRSAA Funds at Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College

- Student aid and support
- Safety and sanitation protocol
- IT upgrades
- Social distancing
- Professional development for faculty and distance learning
- Ongoing student support

The funds assisted students with laptops, reimbursement for food, utilities, and internet costs. The college hired two cleaners who sanitized high-traffic areas and classrooms after every class session. The funds allowed the college to employ a professional cleaning company to come in weekly and sanitize all offices, classrooms, and public areas. The funds also were used to purchase Plexiglas partitions for instructors and students for face-to-face course delivery. IT classroom upgrades include: whiteboard webcams; lectern webcams; upgraded document cameras; motorized classroom cameras; ceiling microphone array; and wireless lavalier microphones.

To ensure social distancing in the classroom, the college was able to lease an additional building to provide a larger classroom to accommodate the high enrollment Native American Studies classes. SCTC also used the funds to contract with Delta College (University Center, MI) for 30 hours of faculty professional development to enhance skills in the delivery of online education. While the funds are available the college plans to provide financial assistance to lessen the students' financial struggles.



Ongoing Challenges at Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College

- Emotional, mental, and behavioral health concerns
- Short Grant Period: Limits ability to support SCTC and students
- Authorized uses needs to be expanded to include all staff and new construction
- Ongoing student support

The pandemic has impacted both students and staff. The Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College is relatively small with a staff of 18 permanent full-time staff/faculty. The primary goal is to prevent, as much as possible, interruption of student learning and support, and this put a lot of weight on the shoulders of staff/faculty as they had to abruptly change gears and shift to an online presence with little or no experience.



As well, our students are faced with additional responsibility of virtual learning and changing family situations. The grant period is rather short when considering the long-term effects COVID will have on members of our staff/faculty and student body and our desire to assist them achieve their goals. Additionally, because pandemic response requires evolving roles of an already limited administration staff, they may be excluded from COVID funding because of their temporary designation as executive staff under the guidelines. Authorized uses need to be expanded to include all staff and new construction. This would be a practical use of funds for tribal colleges, rather than trying to fix out-of-date and insufficient campus buildings or leasing building space. Moving forward, the college is concerned about the long-term effects this pandemic will have on student learning and success. SCTC has lost an estimated 30% of its student body. The college is concerned about how to re-engage these students.

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REQUEST: \$24M TCU IT Service Fund: USDA – Rural Utility Service

The ongoing pandemic has exacerbated the digital divide and homework gap and underscored the lack of broadband access across Indian Country. To address these deficiencies, Congress should establish a *permanent TCU IT Service Fund* within the existing (and previously under-used) **USDA-Rural Utilities Service**

Program. An annual \$24 million set-aside for TCUs, which are the 1994 Land-grant institutions, is needed to cover ongoing equipment costs, maintenance and upkeep, infrastructure expansion, and IT staffing. If TCUs had adequate funding for IT service and infrastructure support, they would have already put in place many of the community-based mobile hot spots needed to address the “homework gap” on many reservations.



Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College: Broadband and IT Challenges

- Operational costs are exorbitant, especially for large licensing expenses.
- SCTC has a single IT staff person to manage the tribal college’s IT purchases and maintenance.
- SCTC and the tribal library provide limited services to the tribal community.
- Bandwidth is critical to the success of hardware initiatives providing ubiquitous access to learning especially for students with no internet access.

Reliable IT services are making the most of online resources and opportunities for faculty professional development and student learning.

The greatest challenge is cost. Operational costs and staffing are major limitations in providing quality IT services to staff, faculty, and students. Equity of network access for all students is necessary for student engagement, learning, and meeting academic needs of today’s students.

REQUEST: \$500 million TCU Construction Fund: DOI – Bureau of Indian Education



A recent AIHEC survey of TCUs revealed a list of chronic facilities-related maintenance and rehabilitation needs, including student and faculty housing, classrooms, libraries, and laboratories. The TCUs have an estimated total need of \$489.75 million in deferred maintenance and rehabilitation and need \$837 million to fully implement existing master plans. A dedicated TCU deferred construction and maintenance/rehabilitation fund through the DOI-BIE would help meet the 21st century needs of *all* TCUs, including technology-enabled facilities; campus renovations; IT infrastructure; and facilities necessary for career, technical, and pipeline programs.

Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College Facilities Needs – Construction, Maintenance, Rehabilitation

- CONSTRUCTION
- Classrooms too small for physical distancing
- Small faculty and staff offices for meeting with students.
- No large gathering area for students
- No meeting space

SCTC has been in leased buildings for the last 19 years. Because SCTC does not own the buildings, it is difficult to make drastic changes needed to create an adequate learning community. Pre-pandemic, the classrooms could hold 12 to 20 students maximum depending on the size of the particular classroom and seating configuration. The science building, which is owned by the college, is located off the main campus in a dilapidated portable. The science lab normally accommodates 12 students. During the pandemic we can allow three students per lab session. The Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe has given the college 295 acres to build a campus. While this is a generous donation, the college has not been able to secure construction funding.